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CONTACT

Brian Coddington
Rockey Hill & Knowlton
(509) 744-3350

Jury convicts man well-known to police of gun crime
Prosecutors seeking 'armed career criminal' designation and long prison sentence

SPOKANE, Wash. – A Spokane man with a violent past faces a lengthy prison term after a federal jury convicted him today of illegally possessing a firearm. The case was investigated and prosecuted under Project Safe Neighborhoods, a multi-jurisdictional law enforcement task force targeting gun crime.

Federal prosecutors will pursue an "Armed Career Criminal" designation at sentencing against Kenneth Dale Gooch after a jury found him guilty of being a Felon in Possession of a Firearm. The Armed Career Criminal classification would mean Gooch, 51, could be sentenced to no less than 15 years in prison under a statutory mandatory minimum. Defendants must have three prior violent felony convictions to qualify as an Armed Career Criminal.

"Project Safe Neighborhoods focuses on gun crimes committed by the worst, most violent offenders," said Jim McDevitt, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Washington. "The defendant in this case has the type of violent criminal history that is well-suited for enhanced Armed Career Criminal penalties."

Gooch has an extensive list of felony convictions dating back to the 1970s, which include assault, robbery, and burglary, according to court records.

Officers with the Spokane Police Department and the Spokane County Sheriff's Office acting under a narcotics search warrant found Gooch asleep in the basement bedroom of a North Regal home. When contacted by police, Gooch had three loaded handguns hidden under the pillows– a .25-caliber Baretta semi-automatic loaded with hollow-point ammunition, a .22-caliber revolver and an H&K .22.-caliber revolver.

Police said Gooch looked directly at them, and reached his hand under the pillows when officers ordered him to roll onto his stomach so they could arrest him. Officers drew their guns and were close to firing at Gooch when he withdrew his hands from under a pillow, and was arrested. The three firearms were then located under a pillow next to where Gooch was seen reaching.

Agents with the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives assisted with this firearms crime investigation.

“Mr. Gooch has been a major problem for the safety of the Spokane community for three decades,” said Jared Kimball, the Assistant U.S. Attorney who tried the case. “He has a history of violence, and is one of the last people that we would want to see possessing a firearm.”

Gooch is scheduled to be sentenced on June 26, 2006, at 9:00 a.m.

Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is a partnership of federal, state and local law enforcement officers and prosecutors working together to reduce criminal gun violence in eastern Washington through aggressive enforcement of existing firearms laws. PSN focuses on the most dangerous criminals who are believed to possess illegal firearms and who create the most risk to the community. Investigation and review of gun crime is being coordinated to identify and pursue the maximum penalties available under state and federal law.

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